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ABSTRACT

These case studies show how to improve the pre-service teaching experience by mentoring cooperating teachers. The case studies come from a Professional Development School (PDS) involving a large university and small secondary school. A system of "super cooperating teachers" was implemented in the PDS to accommodate all of the student teachers at the secondary school. Many of the secondary school teachers were inexperienced and did not have the training required to be mentors. The support system allowed inexperienced teachers to have pre-service teachers in their classrooms. The case studies showed how each of several situations impacted mentor support for inexperienced cooperating teachers (mentoring the mentor, lack of teaching strategies from university methods courses, rapport building, individual insecurities, pre-service teachers working on too many problems at once, and cooperating teachers not taking sufficient time with pre-service teachers). Cooperating teachers who had little foundation in various strategies from their methods courses were problems for the mentoring system. Personal attitudes about rapport building presented difficulties when the mentor system worked with both experienced and inexperienced cooperating teachers. Mentoring systems were also challenged by the insecurities of all participants. The mentoring helped when cooperating and pre-service teachers did not relate well to each other. (SM)

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EVOLVING, YET CREATING A MENTOR SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR PRESERVICE TEACHERS IN A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL

Ramona Madson Mahood

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Abstract: A study to learn how to improve the preservice teaching experience by mentoring the cooperating teacher.

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A private school with a college preparatory curriculum and a vo-tech option available through the public schools was the only secondary school in a professional development school partnership with a large urban university. The school had 270 students (172 African-American, 93 white, 4 Hispanic, 1 Asian). Family incomes ranged from lower to upper middle income. Because of the diversity of the student body, racially, economically, and religiously, it was an ideal place for preservice teachers to experience a diverse school environment. They were able to see students who respected each other's differences and similarities and in fact even liked each other.

The small size of the school and the large number of new teachers limited the number of preservice teachers who could be accommodated each semester. Many of the new hires were inexperienced and did not have three years teaching experience, or the training required to be mentor teachers as stipulated in the school's self improvement plan. Preservice teachers were heavily centered in the new teacher's areas of English and history. As in any school, all faculty members were not willing, or acceptable to assume the role of mentor for a preservice teacher. A system of "super cooperating" teachers was planned in the fall of 1996 in order to accommodate six student teachers for the spring of 1997, some of them teaching in English and history. It was important to establish a support system, so the inexperienced teachers would be willing to have a preservice teacher in their classroom. Some were reluctant at first, but finally everyone agreed. So all preservice teachers would be treated equally regardless of the lack of/or experience of a cooperating teacher, a system of drop-in snap shot observations was planned. There were two placements each semester for preservice teachers, the first a nine week placement followed by a six week placement. Only one cooperating teacher the first part of spring semester 1997 was inexperienced, so there were not as many people initially involved.

This paper looks at our support system through various case studies. They indicate some unanticipated situations, as well as, those we expected because we were working with inexperienced cooperating teachers. We fully expected to work with:

a) mentoring the mentor

b) the lack of teaching strategies from university methods courses

c) rapport building

d) individual insecurities

e) preservice teachers working on too many problems at one time, and

f) cooperating teacher not taking sufficient time with the preservice teacher.

We took into account the cooperating teacher's inexperience whether from being new to the school system, new to the subject matter, or new to the teaching profession. Our case studies indicated how each of these situations impacted mentor support for inexperienced cooperating teachers. Cooperating teachers, or preservice teachers for that matter, who had little foundation in a variety of teaching strategies as learned from teacher-preparation methods courses, also were problems for the mentoring system. Additionally, personal attitudes about rapport building presented difficulties when the mentoring system worked with both experienced and inexperienced cooperating teachers. Finally, mentoring systems were also stretched considerably by the insecurities of all parties involved--cooperating teachers, preservice teachers, and mentors!

Cooperating history teacher Jones* was the only inexperienced teacher for this placement. He had taught while in the Marines, and was in his first year teaching. Administrator Peterson was the cooperating teacher of record. Jones wanted preservice teacher Tim to be more friendly with the students and in particular to reveal personal interests, traits, etc. about himself. Tim's idea of rapport was different, and he revealed nothing personal, and was not spontaneous. He constantly compared himself to Jones saying he knew so much more about history. Tim did not take into consideration, that Jones had an M.S. degree in history, and should know more. Tim was always prepared, well organized and developed detailed outlines for his lectures. He used an overhead projector, so the students could see the outline, and use it as a study guide. Tim tried cooperative learning groups, but lacked the necessary skills for success due to inadequate training in his methods classes at the university. Jones could not help him either, but mentor teacher Grannan was able to make suggestions and set up a plan for further observations when cooperative learning was being used. Jones did not like the overhead, and preferred to write with chalk on the board, and insisted Tim's teaching style was flat because he just stood by the overhead. Thus, Tim developed a pattern of walking back and forth across the front of the classroom that was distracting to some observers, and must have been to the students. He followed a similar plan of

*for privacy all names have been changed for individuals except authors

movement around the room when using cooperative groups and was not able to provide assistance. He just checked to see if the students were on task. **Jones arranged the class so observers sat in front of the class which made it impossible to do drop-in visits and also eliminated the opportunity of seeing what the students were doing, as well as, observe Tim from a better perspective. Personally these two related well, but because of Jones's inexperience, Tim did not get much professional support that would have helped him gain self-confidence.**

Preservice teacher Mary Frances taught 11th and 12 grade English with Grannan, an experienced teacher and former principal. They had a difficult beginning as she had called prior to the Christmas break to cancel an appointment where she and Grannan were to meet. She was ill with influenza and said she would call again. She never rescheduled and just showed up for her first day of orientation and observations in January. Grannan was disturbed about her apparent lack of professionalism, but soon discovered she was accomplished in planning, instructional techniques, and was very knowledgeable about English. She was a mature woman with children of her own about the same age as the students she was teaching. She related well to the students, and they enjoyed her teaching, especially the fact that she shared personal experiences with them and artifacts of her travels around the world. Mary Frances was competent, willing to try new approaches to learning, and patterned many of her lessons after Grannan's group learning techniques. **The group projects worked so well, she was eventually invited to participate in the action research that Grannan and Mahood were conducting using "cooperative learning" comparing advanced placement junior and senior students. She was nominated for the preservice teacher of the year by them.**

Rhonda taught middle school math with Thomas a good mentor teacher. He was precise, well organized, and had tight control of the classroom. He began each class by orally checking the homework from the previous day, gave daily quizzes, and then introduced new material and assigned practice problems, a portion of which would be homework. This semester as part of the mentor teacher project, Thomas tried a different approach that involved team teaching. He wanted to be more involved in the classroom and yet give Rhonda a positive teaching experience. They planned together how she would begin her teaching using his method of checking the homework

orally, writing quizzes on the board, and providing individual assistance as needed for the students. Thomas continued to introduce new material and also provided individual assistance. They worked on different tasks in the classroom. Then Rhonda began introducing the new material, and both of them worked sample problems on the board. Finally, they taught everything together--took turns correcting homework, teaching new material, and putting quizzes on the board. For difficult problems, each demonstrated an alternate way to get the correct answer, and in this way they hoped to help students with different learning styles. Rhonda did have total control of the classroom enough to experience the life of a teacher, but by using this team approach the students received more individual attention and experienced different teaching strategies. Unlike some earlier preservice teachers, Thomas had, Rhonda was competent in math and was able to plan with him rather than just follow his plans. Thomas used body language to control the students, and we have found that **preservice teachers had fewer classroom management problems with the students in math than in other classes. This was the only placement where team teaching had been used to this extent, and it was a positive experience for Rhonda, as well as, the students**.

Since two of the three preservice teachers in the six week placement were with inexperienced cooperating teachers, our mentor support system for each cooperating teacher went into effect and a system of drop-in visits was planned. Each preservice teacher was to have four to five drop-ins per day. Three mentor teachers, an administrator, and the university supervisor were all assigned a specific day and period to visit. This time came from planning periods, administrative time, etc. In reality this system did not work as planned, because people either forgot their schedule or were busy and did not adhere to it. However, it had merit and did provide preservice teachers with considerable input from a number of people. This was especially important in Nita's case.

Nita was paired with Ash, an inexperienced history teacher in middle school. We were informed by Nita's prior university supervisor and by Lee, director of student teacher placement, that she had not completed her first assignment satisfactorily and was on probation for this portion of the semester. From this information we knew our system of drop-in visits would be necessary to check on her progress and to mentor Ash. Peterson signed as cooperating teacher of record.

Initially everything seemed to be going well. Nita was older than Ash, but they related all right. As time went on, Nita was not following the procedure of being prepared to team teach with Ash, and to develop portions of the lesson she would teach. She was to teach a lesson using Ash's lesson plans, and even took them home over the weekend, as well as, the teacher's manual, and then did not come to school on Monday. Needlessly to say, this put Ash in a difficult position for the day. Nita came on Tuesday, full of apologies for what had happened, but still with no lesson plans for her own teaching. University supervisor Mahood and mentor teacher Grannan were out of town, but fortunately Peterson and mentor teacher Stern had both seen Nita in the classroom, and heard from Ash what had happened. Peterson had contacted the University Teacher Education office several times, but had been unable to speak with Lee. When Mahood and Grannan came back, things were in chaos. Mahood was able to reach Lee, and was told that the school had the discretion to terminate Nita's placement. After consultation with Principal Brooks, and everyone involved, especially those who had seen Nita in action, we decided that she should not complete the assignment. With no time to really organize her thoughts, Brooks was eloquent in talking with Nita, and telling her that her placement was being terminated, and she should try student teaching again another semester. Nita chose to complete the day, so the students would not know what had happened. She did not return immediately, but made arrangements with the University and Brooks to observe various teachers at the school throughout the semester. **This experience made us realize the importance of having more than one person from the school visit a preservice teacher and to document what was seen. It gave us additional information should the preservice teacher challenge the decision, and eliminated any chance of personal bias influencing the decision.**

Pam taught 7th and 8th grade English and shared Zee and Williams, two inexperienced teachers, as cooperating English teachers. She had visited the school and Grannan, the cooperating teacher of record before the holidays of 1996. He closely followed and monitored the role of the cooperating teachers. Pam correctly observed that Williams had better control of the 8th grade students than Zee had of the 7th graders, but in mentoring sessions we did not allow her to focus on this. Pam also had better control of the 8th graders. We tried to get Pam to look at the maturity of the students as she organized her classes, so learning could take place. Her lesson plans were detailed with many different things for students to do, in fact, sometimes too many

activities. She never projected to the students any real enthusiasm or passion for learning. Many of the them were taller than she, and she had trouble establishing herself as an authority figure. Her prior preservice teaching assignment had been in a large suburban high school where she had no trouble teaching Spanish. Her attempts at group learning did not go well, and she had difficulty getting the students to work together. On several occasions when drop-ins occurred, only one student was working on task and the others were visiting. Grannan was able to help her focus and organize the groups, but she never really was in control of the 7th grade. At noon one day half way through the placement, she was in tears, ready to leave and never come back. Mahood spent an hour trying to help her gain enough self confidence to manage the 7th grade and convince her, she could finish the teaching assignment. Grannan, Zee, and Williams individually talked with her during the afternoon, but were not sure if she would return the next day. She did return and finished her placement, but was convinced she would never teach middle school. At one point, she made the comment that if she could not control the students and teach at this school, she could not teach anywhere. **With Pam, our plans helped, but certainly did not provide the support we wanted. At the cooperating teachers' meetings with Peterson and Mahood, Zee would speak to Pam's problem, but his inexperience did not allow him to offer solutions. As we tried to mentor the mentor, we were never sure how much he actually helped her.**

Charisse taught French I-IV with cooperating/mentor teacher Stern. To begin her teaching, Stern taught the lesson, and Charisse modeled the lesson and taught it to a different class of students. Charisse was fuzzy in her knowledge of French, especially when it came to the advanced classes. Stern caught this problem early, and suggested they try team teaching. This technique was especially helpful when Charisse was unsure of how to teach a concept, and it gave her more self confidence. At the end of class, Charisse was always asked to reflect on what went well, and what did not go well in the lesson, and to offer solutions about how to change the strategy so it would be better. They discussed alternatives, and Stern offered suggestions. In contrast with other cooperating teachers, Stern spent much time helping Charisse with lesson plans, reviewing completed lesson plans, and offering suggestions for something she did not think would work. **Stern was careful to work with Charisse on only one problem at a time, realizing that too many areas of concern cause the preservice teacher to**

become frustrated and feel like a failure. Stern was such a good mentor that our network was not used to a great extent with Charisse.

Fall semester 1997 there were two preservice teachers teaching during the nine week placement. Leah taught English and history in middle school with Zee as cooperating English teacher, and Ash as history cooperating teacher. Even though Zee was the teacher of record, his teaching experience was limited and Grannan as English department chair was involved as a mentor teacher. We tried to get the mentor system of last spring in action, but it was slow. Ash had less teaching experience than Zee, but she was better able to mentor Leah and actually gave her more suggestions of ways to improve. Leah was less confident in English than in history, and this was a factor in her developing a better rapport with Ash. Ash also had better control of the 8th grade students than Zee had of the 7th grade, and Leah, too, had difficulty controlling the 7th grade as had Pam in the previous semester. Zee was very text book driven in deciding which pieces of literature to teach, and would not allow Leah to chose the pieces she wanted to use--saying he already had the tests made out. We used the same analogy with Leah as we did with Pam spring semester, that 8th grade students are more mature and easier to control. Zee and Mahood suggested to Leah that she talk with Grannan to get help with cooperative learning. He was able to help her with cooperative learning and also gave suggestions about getting students to participate orally with their journals. Preservice teacher Bryan told Leah to observe mentor teacher Stern for help in organizing her classes and also with cooperative learning. **Zee's inability to help Leah did not ruin her placement because she drew support from other mentors and developed a relationship with Ash.**

Bryan had two cooperating teachers Zee and Grannan, as teacher of record. He taught Grannan's 8th grade English and AP English IV, and Zee's AP English III. He was more successful early in the placement with the juniors and seniors, than he was with the 8th graders who presented classroom management problems. He sought advice from Grannan, Mahood, and even Leah about techniques to handle the students. Leah had many of the same students in social studies two hours later in the day. During their common first period planning period, Bryan and Leah planned and mentored each other. Later they decided to do joint lesson plans on Poe for their required "unit plan." Leah taught the regular juniors, and Bryan the AP juniors. **The**

bonding of these preservice teachers helped them overcome the inexperience of their cooperating teachers, and was a plus in our program of mentoring.

The administration at this school was very involved with the PDS concept and always had a representative at the weekly meetings of both preservice teachers and cooperating teachers. Preservice teachers met with Peterson and Mahood every Wednesday morning, and they were able to bring any problems to the cooperating teachers' meeting at noon. **For example, Leah felt she was not doing well in English, and Zee had told her, she needed better transitions. However, he had not been able to model good transitions. In our meetings, Grannan tried to probe Zee asking what he told her, and he replied he told her everything was fine. We encouraged him to tell her what particular things she did well and how to improve those that needed improvement.**

In the latter placement of Fall semester 1997, we had preservice teacher John with inexperienced English teacher Dress, and Grannan, as mentor teacher. We knew John had not successfully completed his nine week placement, and before he was accepted at Bishop Byrne he was interviewed by assistant principal Peterson and mentor English teacher Grannan. He answered all of their questions satisfactorily and was accepted. Our "super cooperating teacher" system of drop-in visits quickly identified problems, but provided no solution even with numerous people trying to help. John could not control the classroom, and would continue to present his lesson when no one in the class was paying attention. He did not appear to see students moving around the classroom or writing on the chalk board. He was unwilling to comply with the school policy of providing lesson plans for each lesson he would teach. He had several lesson plans for a short unit in journalism and wanted to present them in the English class. He even asked Mahood if this would be acceptable. He was told that Dress would make the decision whether they would blend into her overall plan. She had already told him no. In the preservice teachers' weekly meetings, he would change the subject frequently in the middle of a discussion, and we wondered why he did this, but had not thought about the possibility of a hearing impairment. Principal Brooks suspected he had a hearing problem, and when asked admitted he had worn hearing aids in the past, but not at present. Brooks suggested he have a hearing evaluation, as well as, hearing amplification. He was middle age and treated Dress, the

younger, inexperienced female teacher as incompetent and paid attention only to what Grannan said. **The situation became so acute, John was removed from teaching and spent the remainder of the semester observing other teachers. He attempted to complete his teaching assignment at another school Fall 1998, and was removed again. We discover later he had been diagnosed as bipolar.**

Spring semester 1998, the drop-in-visits were helpful, but as with John, there were just more people seeing the same problems and no solution. Rita, a preservice teacher in English, was shared by Grannan and Main. Rita refused to provide lesson plans for either teacher or the principal. From the earlier placement, we knew she had provided lesson plans only when the university supervisor would be there, but had passed the placement. It was only when she was threatened with not passing this six week placement, did she prepare any lesson plans. Her lesson plans for Grannan were very good and well developed. However, she only planned for Grannan, and for Main the entire six weeks were a disaster. She was frequently late for Main's 7th period class, in some instances even forgot to go, and when the subject matter was Shakespeare, Rita chose not to teach. She did not attend faculty meetings regularly and was remiss in many of the routine activities of the school. Rita demonstrated with certain lessons in Grannan's classes, that she could be an effective teacher. Her behavior was erratic, and some days there were long pauses between directions to the students and response to their questions, or just pauses between sentences as she was talking. She did not look at the students directly as she spoke to them. Rita habitually turned her head away and glanced sideways at the class. Principal Brooks noted no eye contact at their initial meeting. At times Rita even appeared to be in a trance and oblivious to classroom unrest. Students in an 8th grade class were tossing pencils across the room and whistling through a straw, and she was unaware of their activities. At a conference with Mahood, she indicated that she felt any suggestions made to her were racial criticisms. She was African-American and Grannan, Main, and Mahood were white. During this long discussion Mahood attempted to help her realize that suggestions were not criticism, but attempts to help her improve her teaching and were not personal. **At an exit conference with Grannan, she revealed that she had difficulty hearing and was on mood medication for depression. She had told the cooperating teacher at her previous placement about these health problems and felt that the information had been used against her, and**

for that reason she told no one at this school. Rita then explained that her medication was changed frequently in an attempt to get her stabilized and when she appeared to be in a trance it was because of the medicine. This information clarified some of the unusual behavior, but did not provide any guidance as to how we could have helped her have a more successful teaching experience, because like John she withheld personal information that affected the students and the mentors.

Another difficult case was preservice teacher Paula, a middle age woman in her second year as a faculty member at the school, was fulfilling the student teaching assignment as an on the job teacher for the entire spring semester. She taught AP and regular American history and was working on a Ph.D. in women's studies All preservice teachers were to be treated the same with drop-in visits from a number of mentor faculty members. They were reluctant to do this, as many had said for the past two years that she was not a competent teacher. Paula was more concerned with students' writing about how they felt, than with the specifics of history. She placed more emphasis on art and music of the era rather than how they related to the events of the time. This was particularly apparent when a student in AP history ask what was communism during a discussion on the history of the late forties and early fifties. Amazingly no one in the class knew. Paula was unprepared for the classroom in terms of preparing and using lesson plans, how to get and keep students involved, and especially with classroom management. She was soft spoken and non-assertive. She took suggestions as personal criticism and became defensive and snippy. **Paula gave no reason when she notified the school in July she would not return for the next year.**

Some of the Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) students have been away from their area of specialization for years and when they decided they wanted to teach, often their subject knowledge was lacking. Holly, like Charisse, a preservice teacher in French struggled with second and third year French, and was totally unqualified for teaching fourth year. Even though Holly had traveled in France, her pronunciation was often incorrect, and the students corrected her. So Stern planned that they would team teach this class regularly. This alternate teaching strategy worked well for French IV and was used in other French classes as well. **Stern helped Holly**

in many of the same ways she had helped Charisse earlier: with lesson plans, reflection over class presentations, analysis of what might have made the lesson go smother, and this helped Holly grow and mature as a teacher.

Ashley, a preservice teacher in biology and English was another example of such content deficiency. Her earlier placement had been in middle school science with apparently no problem, but she struggled with advanced tenth grade biology. Ashley also had little knowledge of how to conduct a biology lab with demonstrations nor her responsibility for students doing experiments. She responded to Wolfe, the biology cooperating teacher and teacher of record, an older male with great respect, almost awe, and Dress, her English mentor, was treated with disdain. **From prior experience we knew that separate cooperating teachers for one preservice teacher presented problems, and two different disciplines only compounded the situation. Ashley related better to one cooperating teacher than the other, just as Leah and Bryan had done before. Like Leah, Ashley felt confident in biology, but not in English, especially Shakespeare.**

We plan to continue our system of "super cooperating" teachers, and are convinced that with more people involved we can improve our support system for preservice teachers, and cooperating teachers. Our mentoring helped when the cooperating teacher and the preservice teacher did not relate well to each other for whatever reason. The age and sex of these people have been factors for us. Older male preservice teachers were often uncomfortable with younger female cooperating teachers. The personality of cooperating teachers and their unwillingness to share ideas had hampered the development of good rapport. Insecurity on the part of a mentor affected the relationship between the cooperating teacher and preservice teacher. It was so important, and there are many variables that did effect it. Cooperating teachers in the Professional Development Schools have had training to be mentor teachers, and knew what to look for when they were evaluating preservice teachers. However, many teachers were uncomfortable evaluating future teachers and tended to give them the highest rating on the evaluation forms. The University has instigated a program with the city school system to train teachers to be cooperating/mentor teachers, but only a small portion of the cooperating teachers have had this training.

Our case studies reinforce the importance of:

-- mentoring the mentor

-- rapport building

-- helping preservice teachers fill in the gaps in their educational program

-- importance of input from numerous drop-in visits to preservice teachers from many different mentors

Questions we wish we had answers for:

-- how the personality of the mentor affects the relationship

-- is the mentor insecure

-- how age and sex of mentor affects preservice teachers

-- why do preservice teachers choose not to share personal information with mentors

-- how students' perceive preservice teachers

-- how to help preservice teachers develop a better teacher presence in the classroom

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